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Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics

U. S. Department of Agriculture
and State Agricultural Colleges
Cooperating

U. S. Extension Service, Office of
Cooperative Extension Work,
Washington, D. C.

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THE FARM WOMAN AND THE AGRICULTURAL SITUATION

By

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I believe that every fair-minded citizen in the United States has at last come to realize that until the purchasing power of the farm family is restored national recovery is impossible, for over 30 percent of our population is still rural, and with its purchasing power destroyed the normal stock of manufactured goods cannot be sold and unemployment and distress are the logical results.

Therefore, it is essential that everyone consider the farm problem, for directly or indirectly it affects the welfare of every citizen of the United States.

In anticipation of the passage of the Farm Relief Bill, much has been said and written giving statistical facts regarding farm products, their cost of production and marketing, prices received for them in their relation to pre-war average, etc. But all too often in current discussions of agriculture, the human element, the farm family life, is left unmentioned. And yet it is the human element that makes or mars every situation. If it were not for the destructive human element of desperation born of fear and a sense of injustice, there would have been no milk strikes, no picketing, and no attack upon a county judge by a few farmers. By the same token, if it were not for the constructive elements of belief in agriculture, and an unshakable faith that fair legislation will be enacted, there would not be such a vast majority of our 32,000,000 rural people who would have gone on passively, even while suffering financial tragedy and acute privation year after year.

The time allotted to me, and your patience as well as my specialization in other fields, do not permit me to review in any adequate way the farm situation, which would involve discussion of economics, production and marketing, gold supply and demand. Therefore, I shall confine my discussion to consideration of the farm woman, for I believe her to be the Alpha and Omega of the farm situation, and that upon the ability of those responsible to gain her support for the Farm Relief Bill will rest in no small degree its success or failure.

It has been asserted that the trend from the farm to the cities some 25 years ago was in large measure a woman movement. It was not a selfish motive which drew women from the farms. Farm women were unwilling that their children should go without certain basic educational and social opportunities which were being afforded to town and city children. They were unwilling to remain on their isolated farms, separated from these opportunities by poor roads, lack of transportation and communication facilities - and the trek

cityward began. Only those farm women themselves will ever realize what loneliness and unhappiness they suffered in this new environment for which they were unfitted, that their children might have greater opportunities.

But time rolled on. Good roads, automobiles, telephones, rural free delivery, better rural schools, rural health services, rural libraries, educational services regarding farming and home making especially designed for farm men and women and boys and girls, and finally the radio, came to the countryside, and farm life began to be deeply satisfying. Not that great wealth was ever to be made at farming. Farming will never provide that, but the quality of life for one's self, one's family, and one's neighbors, began to be educationally and socially satisfying, and family life - that bulwark of civilization - seemed secure and stable. One of the educational services which was made available during this period was home demonstration work, which aids rural women and girls with their home-making problems. It is a part of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics. This work was authorized by the National Legislature in May 1914. Rural home makers recognized that the home demonstration agent, who is a college graduate trained in home economics, had much of helpful aid to bring to them from the research laboratories of the United States Department of Agriculture and the colleges of agriculture. Thus rural women became partners with the Government in a program of better rural life.

These rural home makers began to meet in groups in farm homes to consider what constituted satisfying and efficient family life, and to analyze their own local communities in the light of these facts. They then planned programs of work based upon these needs; the home demonstration agent gave them the needed instruction and the home makers carried out these instructions in their own homes.

Home demonstration work aided with the immediate problems of rural home makers, including such practical matters as more efficient feeding and clothing of the family at minimum cost; care of the family in illness and when accidents occur; correct habit formation in young children; efficient purchasing of needed supplies and equipment; providing the home with furnishings of good design and color; care of poultry, garden, and dairy supplies; and landscaping of home grounds. Soon hundreds of thousands of rural women became members of these organized groups.

In the process of organizing and carrying on this work, rural-woman leadership was developed and trained, and increasingly each year these women studied rural life, its needs and assets, and planned, with the aid of the home demonstration agent, activities which challenged their abilities and improved local conditions. By 1919 this basically important type of educational service was operating in at least some counties in all of the 48 States.

And then came 1920; Many people think that the depression in the United States began in 1929 -- but it didn't! The depression in agriculture began in 1920, when the price of farm products fell much further than did the general price level, and farm products were placed at a great disadvantage in purchasing power. Unfortunately many people refused to recognize this fact, but those who were unselfishly thinking of the Nation's welfare knew that unless parity for agriculture was regained, sooner or later the entire industrial world would become involved and suffer a similar fate, and so it has proved.

Sufficient factual material has been presented in the papers so that everyone knows that farm prices have been very low, but I wonder how many people realize just how great has been the disadvantage of farm life since 1920?

I shall not burden you with many statistics, but I should like to bring just a few facts and figures to your attention. It has long been realized that the rural population is a source of revitalizing urban life. However, it is not generally recognized that 75 percent of the migrants from farms to cities have been under 35 years of age; that their period of dependence and the expense of their education has been paid for by rural parents; and that they come to the city to make their contribution at their most productive period of life. Another fact seldom realized is that over one billion dollars a year in rent paid by farmers is rent to city owners of farms, and that, increasingly, income from farm estates goes to city hoirs.

Other facts not always recognized are the following:

The income for farm families as a return for capital, labor, and management in 1929 was \$847. By 1931 it had dropped to \$343. By the end of 1932 it had declined well below the \$300 mark.

From 1929 to 1932 prices of farm products at the farm dropped 60 percent, whereas nonagricultural prices (those commodities which farm people buy) dropped only 24 percent. Although farm real estate taxes in 1932 were 20 percent below the 1929 peak, farm incomes have decreased much more rapidly than farm taxes.

By the end of 1932, 40 percent of all farms were mortgaged. Of all those mortgaged farms approximately 25 percent were mortgaged up to 25 percent of their value; 30 percent were mortgaged for from 25 to 50 percent of their value; 20 percent were mortgaged for from 50 to 75 percent of their value; 10 percent were mortgaged for from 75 to 100 percent of their value; and 5 percent for over 100 percent of their value.

The difference in the recent capacity of the farmer to purchase commodities as compared with that of earlier years is indicated by the following data:

Purchasing power of 10 bushels of wheat:

Commodity	1910	1917	March 1933
Flour (24 $\frac{1}{2}$ -lb. sacks)	12	13	6
Sugar (lbs.)	135	157	69
Muslin (yds.)	92	76	42
Shoes (pairs)	4	5	2
Gasolino (gals.)	44	60	20

Purchasing power of 100 pounds of pork:

Commodity	1910	1917	March 1933
Flour (24 $\frac{1}{2}$ -lb.sacks)	10	9	6
Sugar (lbs.)	111	105	62
Muslin (yds.)	75	51	38
Shoes (pairs)	3	3	2
Gasoline (gals.)	36	46	19

The foregoing facts tell something of the situation as it has confronted the farm family during this critical period.

The main problems confronting the farm woman during this difficult period have been four:

1. To utilize efficiently every available cent of income from the farm.
2. If possible to supplement the farm income with products of her own endeavor.
3. To maintain the morale of herself, her family, and the community.
4. To render relief to others.

In my judgment, one of the greatest assets in the United States today is the group of 800,000 rural women in 60,000 rural communities, who have been meeting in these groups to study rural needs and assets; set up standards for worth-while rural life; and receive instruction from the home demonstration agent as to how to carry out these objectives in their own homes and communities, and then have done so under her supervision and with her friendly and understanding interest. It is significant that during the past two years not only has interest in this work been maintained, but the number of members in the organized groups has increased from 600,000 to 800,000, in addition to other tens of thousands who have received occasional assistance.

The farm woman having learned during these years of contact with the home demonstration agent that many of the fundamentals of satisfying family life were not dependent upon large amounts of money, but rather upon intelligent planning and use of time and energy and some money, had already followed her advice and experienced many of these satisfactions. In my judgment, this knowledge has been a large factor in the conservative reaction of the vast majority of farmers when farm prices were ruinous.

Saving Available Cash

The average farm woman has always worked industriously and has had but little cash. Each year the depression has added to her difficulties, but she has met them unflinchingly, calling upon the home demonstration agent more and more for needed aid. Instead of purchasing groceries and meats, the farm has

been made to produce the needed supply of food and feed; vastly increased amounts of fruits and vegetables have been stored or dried as part of the needed food supply for the winter months, and the home-canned supply in farm homes and community centers has increased by tens of millions of jars. Garments have been made and remade until they literally have fallen to pieces. Practically all needed purchases have been postponed until a better day. Household repairs have been cared for by family effort. Barter and exchange of services, equipment, and supplies have become not infrequent practices.

Many practices long since relegated to the factory, have been resurrected in the home, and home-made cleaning supplies; home dry cleaning; home laundering of wool and silk; home butchering, sausage making, soap making; even home hair cutting and home washing and carding of wool to make comforts and mattresses have been practiced to save cash expenditures and to utilize farm produce which would bring so little cash on the market.

Thus has the farm woman saved the available cash.

Increasing Cash Income

In addition, the farm woman has done her bit to add to the cash income. She has brought to high standards her garden, dairy, and poultry products. She has met equally rigid standards in canning meats, fruits, and vegetables, and in baking bread, cakes, and pastry. She has made braided and hooked rugs, and woven coverlets and other textile products of great merit. Native supplies such as reed, honeysuckle vines, pine needles, and balsam, have been transformed into artistic baskets, trays, and pillows; and unusual local food products such as maple sugar, tropical fruits, and wild berries have been canned for tourist and other special trade. These products she has sold at wayside markets, curb markets, farm women's cooperative markets, or by parcel post or car-lot shipment. On the open country highway, or near a large city such as our National Capital these courageous, undaunted farm women may be seen on Wednesdays and Saturdays with products of high quality, in sanitary surroundings, at reasonable prices, and proffered with unfailing courtesy.

In home demonstration groups 55,010 rural women have participated in these marketing endeavors with production valued at \$2,766,517. It is to be remembered that they do so not by laying aside the normally long hours of daily housework which every farm home maker experiences, but in addition to these duties which she performs before and after market hours.

Keeping up Morale

As to her third problem, that of the morale of herself, her family, and her community, it is impossible to adequately describe the courageous achievement of farm women in this regard. The monthly meeting with the home demonstration agent and other farm women is of itself a source of deep satisfaction, providing as it does an opportunity for discussion of their mutual interests and problems.

Farm women have realized however, that inexpensive but well-defined recreational activities are essential to keep up the morale of farm people, and they have definitely planned for family and community good times. The development of choruses and orchestras, the presentation of plays and pageants,

widespread participation in county-wide picnics and achievement-day programs, have been some of the definite results of this organized endeavor among farm women to use home talent for recreational satisfaction. In the process, previously unrecognized talents and leadership abilities, have been discovered and utilized with deep satisfaction to all concerned and have done much to stimulate cultural growth and enjoyment.

Relief Activities

Although in straitened circumstances themselves, farm women have rendered generous assistance to others even less fortunate. They have housed and fed relatives who have been discharged from industry. They have acted as local agents for relief agencies in locating available supplies, in listing needy families, and in distributing supplies. They have met in groups for all-day sewing or canning activities for the use of relief agencies. They have aided those who have come from cities to farms with the objective of permanent residence but who are uninformed as to farming processes and farm life, have given to these newcomers basically needed information, and have aided them to find a satisfying place in the life of the community. Farm women have even assisted those who have come to the farm as a last resort, and who will return to industry as soon as possible. Such persons have been helped to produce and conserve their own food supply.

What of the Future

These rural women in the main love farm life. They have experienced and appreciated the satisfactions of rural life when adequate educational and social services have been available to them. They are studying the general situation as to present uses of public funds in county, State, and national budgets. They know what the farm family is paying (or is due to pay) in taxes. They know that farm people have not had a fair chance with other groups in receiving recompense for capital and labor invested. They are fair-minded and farsighted. They are patiently waiting at this moment, but they are aroused by their long, tragic experience. They are hoping for fair play and real relief, but their ability to withstand the strain much longer is questionable.

This group of over 800,000 organized rural women, in approximately 60,000 rural communities, is a great national asset. Conservative in thought and action, and interested in maintaining a fine type of rural life, they are asking that justice be given to agriculture by the Federal Government. It is devoutly to be hoped that adequate provision for farm relief will soon be enacted so that rural people, as typified by these farm women, may soon be rejoicing in the satisfaction of equality of opportunity, adequate public services, and efficient family and community life, and be able to make their contribution as constructively minded citizens to orderly progress in personal and public affairs.



